

Rumi and wahdat al-wujud

Few technical terms of Sufism are as well known as wahdat al-wujud, “Oneness of Being” or “Unity of Existence.” Though this expression has historical connections with the school of Ibn al-'Arabi, it is sometimes employed to refer to the views of other Sufis, including figures who lived long before Ibn al-'Arabi. It has also been said that Rumi supported wahdat al-wujud, but if this statement is taken to mean that Rumi derived the idea from Ibn al-'Arabi or his students, serious historical and intellectual questions arise. In order to understand these questions, one needs a clear idea of the meaning of the term wahdat al-wujud.

Tawhid

The expression wahdat al-wujud is built from two words - wahda and wujud - both of which were important for Islamic thought from early times. Islamic theory and practice is grounded in the shahada or the giving witness that “There is no god but God,” an expression often called kalimat al-tawhid, the “statement through which God’s Unity is declared.” The basic sense of tawhid or the declaration of God’s Unity is that everything in creation derives from God, who is One Reality. The word tawhid comes from the same root as wahda, as do other related and often discussed terms such as ahad and wahid (“one”) and ahadiyya and wahdaniyya (“oneness” or “unity”). Already in the sayings of 'Alī we come across a reference to four different meanings for the apparently simple statement, “God is One.”

The discussion of wujud enters Islamic thought somewhat later than the discussion of wahda and plays an important role especially in the development of falsafa or philosophy, which is often defined as the study of wujud. If the term wahdat al-wujud is not found in any texts before the works of Ibn al-'Arabi school, many statements of the Sufis approximate it. Ma'ruf al-Karkhi (d. 200/815-816) is said to have been the first to reexpress the shahada in the form often heard in later centuries, “There is nothing in wujud but God.” Abul-'Abbas Qassab (fl. 4th/10th century) used similar terms: “There is nothing in the two worlds except my Lord. The existent things (mawjudat) - all things except His wujud - are non existent f madum).”

Khwaja Abdallah Ansar! (d. 481/1089) provides several formulations of tawhid in Persian and Arabic that surely inspired later authors. In defining five levels of tawhid, he speaks about the third level as wujud al-tawhid or "the existence of tawhid," which is "to leave all witnesses and enter into the Eternal Witness." The final stage, the "enfolding of tawhid within tawhid," is "the absorption of that which never was into That which ever is." In another passage, Ansar! refers to the "tawhid of the elect" as the fact that "No one is other than He" (laysa ghayrahu ahad). "What is tawhid", Ansar! asks. "God, and nothing else. The rest is folly (hawas)."

By the time of al-Ghazal! (d. 505/1111), the term wujud is often employed in explanations of tawhid's meaning. In *Mishkat al-anwar* al-Ghazal! describes the fruit of the spiritual ascent of the gnostics as follows: "They see through direct witnessing that there is nothing in wujud save God and that 'All things are perishing except His Face'" (Sura 28:88).⁷ Al-Ghazal! did not consider this understanding of tawhid a specifically Sufi teaching, appropriate only for his more esoteric works, since he makes the same point in his famous *Ihyai 'ulum al-din*: "There is nothing in wujud but God ... wujud belongs only to the Real One." Passages such as these, which were later looked upon as statements of the doctrine of wahdat al-wujud, are numerous, but let us turn to the expression itself and the "Greatest Master," al-Shaykh al-Akbar, Muhyi al-Din ibn al-'Arabi (d. 638/1240), to whom its first clear and detailed formulation is usually ascribed.

Ibn al-'Arabi

Few figures in Islamic intellectual history have been as pervasively influential as Ibn al-'Arabi. Nevertheless, modern scholars have produced only a relatively small number of serious studies of his works, and these have usually been limited in scope. This is hardly surprising, since Ibn al-'Arabi was one of the most prolific and difficult of all Muslim authors. All his works exhibit an extremely high level of sophistication, definitely not for popular consumption. When he refers disparagingly to the 'amma or "common people," he usually has in mind the exoteric scholars, the jurists or "knowers of formalities" ('ulama al-rusum) as he calls them - in other words, the learned class of Muslims in the ordinary sense of the term. But he also uses the term for Sufis who have not yet advanced to the stage

of “verification” (tahqiq) and who continue to follow authority (taqlid). Ibn al-'Arabi expected his readers not only to be practitioners of Sufism but also to be familiar with most fields of learning, especially Koran commentary, hadith, jurisprudence, theology, and philosophy, and he made few allowances for those who did not know these sciences well. His writings are clear, consistent, and logically structured, even though they may appear opaque to those not familiar with them. As James Morris remarks, “The bizarre epithets one sometimes finds applied to Ibn al-'Arabi, whether in Islamic or modern Western sources - e.g., ‘incoherent,’ ‘pantheist,’ ‘heretic,’ ‘monist,’ ‘madman,’ etc - are understandable less as reasoned judgments about the whole of his work than as reactions to the difficult challenge of unifying and integrating such diverse and challenging materials.”

Despite the fact that relatively little research has been carried out on Ibn al-'Arabi teachings, his fame along with that of wahdat al-wujud has spread far outside academic circles. But Ibn al-'Arabi himself, so far as is known, never employs the term wahdat al-wujud in his enormous corpus of writings, even though he frequently discusses wujud and the fact that it can be described as possessing the attribute of oneness or unity (employing such terms as wahda, wahdaniyya, and ahadiyya). For example:

Nothing has become manifest in wujud through wujud except the Real (al-haqq), since wujud is the Real, and He is one.

The entity [ayn] of wujud is one, but its properties [ahkam] are diverse.

Number [‘ adad] derives from the one that accepts a second, not the one of wujud [al-wahid al-wujud].

All of wujud is one in reality; there is nothing along with it.

But what did Ibn al-'Arabi mean when he said that wujud is one? If Ali provided four different meanings for the statement “God is one,” the statement “ Wujud is one” cannot be as simple as it might appear, especially since the later use of the term wahdat al-wujud, by its supporters as well as its detractors, hinges upon divergent understandings of what this oneness implies.

At the outset, we need to know that any attempt to explain the

meaning of wahdat al-wujud as understood by Ibn al-'Arabi will be deficient and misleading, all the more so if one tries to classify his teachings as pantheism, panentheism, existential monism, pantheistic monism, or the like. Ibn al-'Arabi explains wahdat al-wujud in hundreds of different contexts, each time adding nuances that are lost when any attempt is made, as it soon is in most Western studies, to “come to the point.” His “point” does not, in fact, lie in any simple formulation of wahdat al-wujud. If people want a simple statement, they should be satisfied with “There is no god but God.” Ibn al-'Arabi point lies more in the very act of constantly reformulating wahdat al-wujud in order to reshape the reader's imagination. In each new context in which he expresses wahdat al-wujud, he demonstrates the intimate inward interrelationships among phenomena, basing himself on a great variety of texts drawn from the Koran, hadith, kalam, philosophy, cosmology, Arabic grammar, and other sources.

Ibn al-'Arabi is a visionary, not a philosopher, which means among other things that he is not trying to reach a conclusion or build a system. He had no intention of systematizing Islamic thought, even though various passages in his writings take systematic form (and sometimes contradict the systematic formulations he has provided elsewhere). He is a sage who has a vision of reality that he is trying to communicate through all the means at his disposal, including logical discourse in the philosophical and theological style, exegesis of the Koran and hadith, and poetry. (We should not forget that Ibn al-'Arabi was one of the greatest and most prolific poets in the Arabic language.) Wahdat al-wujud is one of the many dimensions of the overall vision Ibn al-'Arabi wants to convey. He did not consider it the highest expression of his teachings, which helps explain why he himself has no single word for it. The fact that wahdat al-wujud came to be chosen as the term that typifies his point of view has less to do with Ibn al-'Arabi himself than with certain figures who followed him.

The statement that Ibn al-'Arabi was a visionary and not a philosopher needs some clarification. Ibn al-'Arabi frequently tells us that reason or intellect (' aql) is inadequate as a source of knowledge of God, the world, and the self. His own teachings are based primarily upon unveiling (kashf), direct witnessing (shuhud , mushahada), and tasting (dhawq), all of which transcend the limitations of reason. He repeatedly quotes Koranic verses such as “Have fear of

God, and God will teach you” (Sura 2:287). Only this teaching by God Himself, founded upon observing the rules and regulations of the sharia and the discipline of the tariqa or spiritual path can lead to true knowledge.

One of Ibn al-'Arabi most important technical terms is *tajalli* “self-disclosure,” derived ultimately from the Koranic story of Moses and God’s self-revelation to the mountain (Sura 7:143). The self-disclosure of God is at the same time ontological and epistemological, objective and subjective, since God displays Himself in both knowledge and the universe. Ibn al-'Arabi does not think up or produce ideas. He simply records God’s self-disclosures, which he perceives objectively and subjectively; nor would he draw a distinction between objective and subjective - this is our terminology, not his. Often his unveilings take the shape of incredible formal visions of the unseen world. He would feel completely at home with Rumi verses:

First there were intoxication, loverhood, youth and the like; then came luxuriant spring, and they all sat together.

They had no forms and then became manifested beautifully within forms
behold things of the imagination assuming form!

The heart is the antechamber of the eye: For certain, everything that reaches the heart will enter into the eye and become a form .

Once we grasp the fact that we are not dealing here with a philosophical or theological system, we can begin to appreciate the difficulty of providing even an elementary understanding of *wahdat al-wujud*. As Toshihiko Izutsu has justly remarked.

No philosophical explanation can do justice to [Ibn al-'Arabi] thought unless it is backed by a personal experience of the Unity of Being [*wahdat al-wujud*] ... Philosophical interpretation is after all an afterthought applied to the naked content of mystical intuition .

A major problem in understanding *wahdat al-wujud* is the term *wujud*, which for the most part I have avoided translating in this article, since there is no satisfactory equivalent in English. To render it either as “being” or “existence” raises difficulties, a thorough

investigation of which could easily fill the remainder of this paper. Here I want to point out another well-known problem connected with the term. Since wujud derives from the root w-j-d “to find,” it means not only to be found in an objective sense (in other words, to exist out there), but also the act of finding as a subjective experience. More specifically, wujud refers both to God as the Absolute Reality and to the finding of God as experienced by God Himself and by the spiritual seeker. Hence Ibn al-'Arabi often refers to the “people of unveiling and finding” (ahl al-kashf wa l-wujud), meaning those who have experienced the lifting of the veils that separate them from God, thus finding God in the cosmos and in themselves. In this sense wujud is practically synonymous with shuhud (often translated as “witnessing” or “contemplation”). Wujud, like shuhud, refers to tajalli, the divine self-disclosure, and both words have objective and subjective senses. For this and other reasons, the later debate between the supporters of wahdat al-wujud and those of wahdat al-shuhud obscures the fact that Ibn al-'Arabi cannot be placed in one category or the other without distorting his overall teachings.

If the question of wujud as subjective experience is ignored, it can be seen that Ibn al-'Arabi employs the term wujud in two basic senses. First, the term refers to God, who is the Real Being (al-wujud al-haqq) or the Necessary Being (wajib al-wujud) who cannot not be. Second, the term may also refer to the universe or the things within it. However, when Ibn al-'Arabi speaks of the wujud of “that which is other than God” (ma siwa Allah), he is using the term in a metaphorical sense (majaz). Like al-Ghazali and many others, he maintains that in reality (haqiqa), wujud belongs only to God. If things other than God appear to exist, this is because God has lent them wujud, much in the same way that the sun lends light to the inhabitants of the earth. In the last analysis, there is nothing in existence but the Real. There is only one Being, one wujud, even though we are justified in speaking of many “existent things” (mawjudat) in order to address ourselves to the plurality that we perceive in the phenomenal world.

If wujud belongs only to God, then everything other than God is nonexistent in itself, though it is existent to the extent that it manifests the Real. In themselves the creatures are entities (a'yan) or things (ashya), but they possess no existence of their own. The so-called immutable entities (al-a'yan al-thabita), often misleadingly called archetypes, are the things as they are known by God for all eternity; in other words, the immutable entities are the things

without reference to their existence in the created world. Hence they are more or less synonymous with what the philosophers call essences or quiddities (mahiyat).

When God bestows existence upon the entities, they appear in the universe, just as colors appear when light shines. But since the entities have no existence of their own, nothing is perceived but the wujud of God imbued with the properties (ahkam) of the entities. In trying to explain this point, one can do no better in a brief discussion than refer to the analogy of the rainbow, where the multiplicity of colors does not negate the oneness of light. Red and blue have no existence of their own, since only light is manifest. We can speak of the reality or entity or thingness (shay'iyya) of red and blue, but not of their own, independent existence; their existence is only a mode of light's existence.

Though Ibn al-'Arabi often discourses on the nature of wujud oneness, he devotes far more attention to affirming the reality of multiplicity. His basic teaching goes back to the divine names mentioned so frequently in the Koran. The names are the archetypes of manyness, a divinely revealed affirmation of the reality of multiplicity. But again, to uphold the reality of multiplicity does not, in Ibn al-'Arabi view, necessitate upholding the independent wujud of the multiple things.

Ibn al-'Arabi commonly expresses his most fundamental view of wujud through the theological concepts of tanzih and tashbih. The first term is often translated as "transcendence," the second as "anthropomorphism" or "immanence." Here I translate the words more literally as "incomparability" and "similarity." Ibn al-'Arabi declares that God in Himself is incomparable with every created thing. In other words, wujud is totally beyond the reach of everything in the cosmos; it is the absolutely no manifest (al-batin). But, the Koran teaches that God is not only no manifest, but also manifest (al-zahir). As such, God is similar to all things, since, by means of His names, He displays the properties of His own attributes in the cosmos. The universe is nothing but the outward manifestation of the innate properties of wujud, just as colors, forms, and shapes are nothing but the outward manifestation of light. God is at once incomparable, because absolutely no manifest, and similar, because He displays His names and attributes by means of the existent things.

Wujud, therefore, is not only one. The term wahdat al-wujud in its literal sense does not afford a sufficient description of the nature of reality. Wujud is one in itself at the level of its no manifestation or its incomparability, and many through its manifestation or its similarity; God is one in His essence (dhat) and many through His names. Hence Ibn al-'Arabi sometimes refers to God as the “One/Many” (al-wahid al-kathir).

The most succinct expression of Ibn al-'Arabi teachings about the nature of the one wujud and its relationship to the multiplicity of the cosmos is probably the phrase “He/not He” (huwa la huwa). What is a creature, a thing, an existent reality, a world? It is He/not He. A thing is identical with wujud inasmuch as it exists, but other than wujud inasmuch as it is itself. Ibn al-'Arabi opponents, in criticizing his teachings, look only at the first half of this phrase: “The cosmos is He.” This sentence recalls the refrain employed by Persian poets long before Ibn al-'Arabi, “All is He” (hama ust). For his part, Ibn al-'Arabi constantly affirms that the cosmos is also not He. One must combine affirmation and negation, just as one must combine incomparability and similarity. To affirm that “All is He” and to forget that “All is not He” would be unacceptable. But it would be equally unacceptable to claim that “All is not He” in every respect, for that would make the cosmos into an independent reality, another divinity.

Ibn al-'Arabi sometimes calls those who witness the cosmos as He/not He “the possessors of two eyes” (dhu l-aynan). With one eye they look at God’s absolute incomparability and with the other His similarity:

The perfect human being [al-insan al-kamil] has two visions [nazar] of the Real, which is why God appointed for him two eyes. With one eye he looks upon Him in respect of the fact that He is “independent of the worlds” [Sura 3:97]. So he sees Him neither in any thing nor in himself. With the other eye he looks upon Him in respect of His name All-merciful [al-rahman], which seeks the cosmos and is sought by the cosmos. He sees His wujud permeating all things.

Sadr al-din Qunawi

Probably the most influential of Ibn al-'Arabi disciples was Sadr

al-din Qunawl (d. 673/1274). Qunawi's father, Majd al-din Ishaq, was a scholar and Sufi from Malatya in present-day Turkey who met Ibn al-'Arabi on a pilgrimage to Mecca in the year 600/1204. In 602/1205-1206 the two traveled to Malatya together, and Ibn al-'Arabi may have been present at the birth of Majd al-din's son in 606/1210. After Majd al-din's death, Ibn al-'Arabi married his widow and undertook the training of Sadr al-din, who became one of his closest disciples. When Ibn al-'Arabi died in 638/1240, Sadr al-din returned to Anatolia and settled in Konya, where he eventually became a friend of Rumi. Aflaki provides many accounts of the high regard in which the two held each other, and he tells us that Rumi asked Shaykh Sadr al-din to lead the prayer at his funeral. Qunawi died seven months after Rumi.

Of all Ibn al-'Arabi immediate disciples, Qunawi was the most thoroughly acquainted with philosophy. Having studied the commentary of the foremost spokesman for the Peripatetic philosophy, Nasir al-Din Tusi (d. 672/1274), on Avicenna's al-Isharat wa /-tanbihat, Qunawi initiated a correspondence, asking Tusi many technical questions about the Peripatetic position. He felt enough mastery of Avicenna's writings to object on his behalf to Tusi's answers and to suggest that he reread a particular passage in Avicenna's Ta'liqdt. In explaining his motive for writing, Qunawi said that he hoped to combine the conclusions derived from logical proofs (burhan) with the fruits of verified unveiling (mukashafa-yi muhaqqaq) and face-to-face vision of the unseen world (iyan).

Qunawi's philosophical bent appears mainly in the logical and systematic structure of his writings. In contrast, Ibn al-'Arabi al Futuhat al-makkiyya is essentially a commentary on selected passages from the Koran and hadith. In reading the Futuhat, one always feels close to the sources of the Islamic tradition and never senses a predominance of the systematic style of the philosophers. But Qunawi's works are dominated by a rational and coherent style, even if the emphasis on mystical unveiling as a source of knowledge would not convince a logician. At least partly because of his grounding in the philosophical tradition, Qunawi stresses the centrality of wujud to all discussion, whereas this point is not nearly so apparent in the works of Ibn al-'Arabi, who is more likely to use Koranic terminology. Qunawi's connections with philosophy provided Ibn Taymiyya with a reason to attack him even more violently than he attacked Ibn al-'Arabi. Ibn Taymiyya summarizes the

difference of approach that appears in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabi and Qunawi by quoting their disciple 'Afif al-Din Tilimsani (d. 690/1291):

As for Ibn al-'Arabi's companion Sadr al-Din of Rumi, he had pretensions to philosophy [mutafalsij], so he was further from the shari'a and Islam. That is why ... Tilimsani used to say, "My first shaykh was a philosophizing spiritual [mutarawh mutafalsij], while my second was a spiritual philosopher [faylasuf mutarawh]."

Though Qunawi employs the expression wahdat al-wujud (or waluia wujudih, "one oneness of His Being") in at least two passages, he does not use it as an independent technical term. Rather, it comes up naturally in discussions of the relationship between God's wujud and oneness. In the following passage he employs the philosophical language of wahda and wujud to explain the two modes of the Real - His oneness in Himself and His plurality in His manifestation:

Know that the Real is sheer wujud within which is no diversity and that He is one with a true oneness in contrast to which no manyness can be conceptualized ... All things perceived in the entities and witnessed in the engendered things ... are the properties of wujud, or, call them the forms of the relationships within His knowledge ... Call them what you like: They are not wujud, since wujud is one ... Wujud cannot be perceived by a human being inasmuch as he is one with a true oneness, like wahdat al-wujud ... Nothing issues from God, in respect of the wahda of His wujud, except one .

In another passage Qunawi employs the expression "the oneness of His wujud" in the midst of explaining that multiplicity does not contradict wujud oneness, since the multiple things are merely the "tasks" (shu'un, sing, shan) of the divine Essence. These tasks, Qunawi explains elsewhere, are identical with the immutable entities (al-ayan al-thabita)?

As for the interrelationship [munasaba] between the One Real and everything else, that is established on the part of the "other" [sm'd] in respect of the fact that God's tasks are not other than God, since they are the realities of the things, which introduce plurality into the wahda of His wujud and are named the "others" [aghyar].

As these two passages show, Qunawi, like Ibn al-'Arabi, held that

the oneness of wujud does not prevent the multiplicity of its self manifestations. Though one in its essence or in respect of its incomparability, wujud is many in its appearances or in respect of its similarity. In Qunawi's own words, "Though there is nothing but one wujud, it manifests itself as diverse, multiple, and plural because of the diversity of the realities of the receptacles. Nevertheless, in itself and in respect of its disengagement from the loci of manifestation, wujud does not become plural or multiple."

Sa'id al-Din Farghani

Among Qunawi's many disciples and students, two were especially important for the spread of Ibn al-'Arabi's school. The first was Mu'ayyid al-Din Jandi (d. 690/1291), whose commentary on Ibn al-'Arabi's *Fusus al-hikam* formed the basis for most of the numerous commentaries that were written later. Though he was deeply concerned with explaining the nature of wujud and wahda, he does not appear to have employed the term *wahdat al-wujud* even in passing. Phrases approximating it, however, are not difficult to find; for example: "Wujud is one reality that becomes intelligibly differentiated within distinct levels"; "None has wujud except one entity, which is the Real." Jandi wrote poetry in both Arabic and Persian, including this line: "He is one, the existent in all, He alone, but imagination calls Him 'other.'"

The second major follower of Qunawi was Sa'id al-din Farghani (d. 699/1300), author of the first commentary on the famous "Poem of the Way" (*Nazm al-suluk* or *al-Taiyya*) of Ibn al-Farid. Farghani wrote this work first in Persian with the title *Mashariq al-dararf*. Then he wrote a much more detailed version in Arabic, renaming it *Muntaha l-madarik*. In a short preface to the Persian text, Qunawi says that in the year 643/1245-1246 (five years after Ibn al-'Arabi death) he traveled from Syria to Egypt with a group of learned and spiritually advanced Sufis. During this journey and upon his return to Anatolia, he read and explained the "Poem of the Way" to his companions, who took notes with the aim of compiling commentaries on difficult passages; only Farghani! succeeded in this goal. Hence we have Qunawi's testimony that Farghani's works are based directly on his teachings, though in any case this is obvious from the style and content.

In the Persian environment Farghani's two commentaries seem to

have been as influential as any other work of Ibn al-'Arabi school except Ibn al-'Arabi own *Fusus al-hikam*. But while the *Fusus* was considered difficult if not enigmatic and was seldom quoted except to provide brief statements of ideas, Fargham's works were frequently cited to explain Ibn al-'Arabi teachings. Farghan! found many devotees among the later students of *wahdat al-wujud* because, in contrast to Ibn al-'Arabi in the *Fusus*, he dealt with each point of doctrine in a systematic manner, and in contrast to Qunawi, he explained each point in detail.

Farghan! employs the term *wahdat al-wujud* about thirty times in his Persian commentary and probably at least as many times in the Arabic version of the work. As remarked earlier, Ibn al-'Arabi expresses the doctrine of *tawhid* by declaring that God is both incomparable and similar, or one in Himself and many through the loci of His self-manifestation. Farghan! sometimes expresses this same idea by contrasting the oneness of *wujud* with the manyness of God's knowledge (*kathrat al-'ilm*). God knows all things in Himself as immutable entities; then, on the basis of this knowledge, He creates the universe. An ultimate oneness underlies creation because God is one, but the creatures are many in a true sense because all multiplicity goes back to God's knowledge of the many things. Oneness and manyness are both attributes of the divine reality, though from different points of view. In Fargham's words, "Both the oneness of *wujud* and the manyness of knowledge ... are attributes of the Essence."

When Farghan! employs the expression *wahdat al-wujud*, he usually considers it one of the three main stages of spiritual growth undergone by travelers on the path. From this point of view, the contemplation of *wahdat al-wujud* is the first and lowest stage, while the contemplation of the manyness of God's knowledge is the second stage. The third and final stage combines oneness and manyness in a harmonious balance. At this stage, the prophet or the friend of God sees with "two eyes," as Ibn al-'Arabi puts it. There is also a fourth stage, but it pertains exclusively to the prophet Muhammad.

In Farghani's writings, *wahdat al-wujud* has still not been established as an independent technical term, and certainly not as a designation for a specific school of thought. Moreover, the context of Fargham's use of the term demonstrates that he does not consider it

especially fundamental to Ibn al-'Arabi point of view. Though he makes the same basic points in the Persian and Arabic versions of his commentary, he often does not carry the term *wahdat al-wujud* over from Persian into Arabic. If it were a technical term of any significance, he would certainly have kept it in the Arabic version. It is only the elements that make up the expression - *wahda* and *wujud* - that are important for the discussion, not the expression itself.

It is easy to see that Ibn al-'Arabi and his immediate followers accepted that there is only one true *wujud* and held that the multiplicity of the cosmos manifests the one *wujud* without making it plural.

But Ibn al-'Arabi never employs the term *wahdat al-wujud*, while Qunaw! only mentions it in passing. Once Farghan! begins to employ the term repeatedly, it refers to a relatively low station of spiritual realization, since the adept who witnesses *wahdat al-wujud* still has to ascend to the manyness of knowledge and beyond; only the greatest of the prophets and friends of God attain to the station of combining the two perspectives, and at this point the term *wahdat al-wujud* plays no significant role. It is only in describing the first stage of the path that Farghan! sometimes uses it.

The question that naturally arises here is the following: How did the term *wahdat al-wujud* come to be singled out as the outstanding doctrine of Ibn al-'Arabi and his school? Not enough is known about the works of the various figures writing immediately after Ibn al-'Arabi to answer this question with certainty, but tentative conclusions can be suggested.

Ibn Sab'in

Among the authors who may have used the term *wahdat al-wujud* in a technical sense are such disciples of Ibn al-'Arabi as Ibn Sawdakin (d. 646/1248) and Afif al-Din Tilimsani. The most likely source of the term is Qunawi's contemporary Ibn Sab'in (d. 669/1270), the author of the well-known answers to the "Sicilian Questions" by Emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen. Though A. F. Mehren and L. Massignon count Ibn Sab'in as the last representative of the Arab peripatetic school, and though Ibn Sab'in was certainly familiar with the Greek philosophers and their followers in Islam, his published writings display him primarily as a Sufi. One has to agree with Michel Chodkiewicz that Ibn Sab'in was thoroughly influenced by the perspective of Ibn al-'Arabi, even if he does not acknowledge

this fact in his works.

When Ibn Sab'in expresses his own teachings, he often employs aphoristic, elliptical, and mysterious expressions more reminiscent of the sayings of the early Sufis than of philosophical treatises. His works stand in stark contrast to those of Qunawi, whose philosophical training shows even when he recounts his most exalted visionary experiences, as in his *al-Nafahdt al-ildhiyya*. It seems that much of what Ibn Sab'in wrote was aimed at his own disciples and had practical applications to the spiritual life; hence he tends toward ellipses and paradoxes, throwing the disciples back upon their own spiritual resources to understand the point.

In the context of Sufism, Ibn Sab'in appears primarily as a spiritual teacher who often employs the language of philosophy to make his point and who sometimes had to write philosophically for a public audience. All his works need to be read in the light of treatises such as his *Risalat al-naslha*, also known as *al-Nuriyya*, which deals mainly with the remembrance or invocation of God (*dhikr*). In this work, Ibn Sab'in makes the practical application of his teachings explicit. He aims to take away the assurances of logical discourse and throw the disciple back on the invocation of the divine name "Allah." Chodkiewicz points out that Ibn Sab'in frequently injects the phrase "Allah alone" (*Allah faqat*) into the midst of his writings as a sort of leitmotiv. But this is not a statement of a philosophical position, but an incitement to his readers to follow the Koranic injunction, "Say 'Allah,' then leave them to themselves, playing their game of plunging" (*Sura 6:91*).

What is of particular interest here is that in several passages Ibn Sab'in employs the term *wahdat al-wujud*, not in passing, but as a specific designation for the fundamental nature of things. In him we find what we did not find in Qunawi and his followers, namely, instances in which the term appears to have become a technical expression referring to the worldview of the sages and the friends of God. For example, he writes:

The common people and the ignorant are dominated by the accidental, which is manyness and plurality, while the elect - the men of knowledge - are dominated by the root, which is *wahdat al-wujud*. He who remains with the root does not undergo transferal or transformation; he remains fixed in his knowledge and his realization. But he who stays with the branch

undergoes transformation and transference; things become many in his eyes, so he forgets and becomes negligent and ignorant.

Awhad al-din Balyani

Among the important figures who followed in the line of Ibn Sab'in is Awhad al-din Balyani (d. 686/1288), who was probably connected to him through Ibn Sab'in's chief disciple, Shushtari. Balyani is the author of the "Treatise on Unity," translated into English in 1901 and often quoted to illustrate Ibn al-'Arabi's understanding of the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*. Until recently this work was usually attributed to Ibn al-'Arabi himself, but Michel Chodkiewicz has shown that it is by Balyani and that it does not present a balanced statement of Ibn al-'Arabi's teachings. The tone is familiar:

By Himself He sees Himself, and by Himself He knows Himself. None sees Him other than He, and none perceives Him other than He. His veil is His oneness; nothing veils other than He. His veil is the concealment of His existence in His oneness, without any quality ... His Prophet is He, and His sending is He, and His word is He. He sent Himself with Himself to Himself.

So the work continues; in sum, it is an ecstatic hymn set to the tune of the Persian poetical exclamation, "All is He!" (*hama ust*). Hence it should not be surprising to hear that its author lived in Shiraz and wrote Persian poetry that presents the same ideas in a non-philosophical style full of precedents in his own language.

Balyani's exposition of *wahdat al-wujud* cannot be put into the same category as that of Ibn al-'Arabi and his immediate disciples, who always took care to offset expressions of God's similarity with descriptions of His incomparability. Where Balyani and others like him say "He," Ibn al-'Arabi and his followers say "He/not He."

though this does not mean that Balyani had nothing more to say on the matter. His "Treatise on Unity" is no more an attempt to provide a full explanation of the nature of existence than was the oft-repeated "I am the Real" (*ana l-haqq*) of al-Hallaj.

Sa'd al-Din Hammuya and 'Aziz al-Din Nasafi

One of the many important figures who may have played a role in establishing *wahdat al-wujud* as a technical term is Sa'd al-Din Hammuya (d. 649/1252), a Persian disciple of the great Najm al-din Kubra. Hammuya spent several years in Damascus, where he met both Ibn al-'Arabi and Sadr al-Din Qunawi. He wrote a letter to Ibn al-'Arabi in which he asked him to clarify certain points in some of his writings. Though Hammuya is the author of more than fifty works, only one of these has been edited, probably because most of his writings offer little encouragement to scholars. As Jam! noted five hundred years ago, “He has many works ... full of mysterious sayings, difficult words, numbers, diagrams, and circles, which the eye of reason and thought is incapable of deciphering.” Some passages quoted from Hammuya by his disciple 'Aziz al-Din Nasafi (d. before 700/1300) suggest that he expressed himself in an aphoristic and elliptical style similar to that of Ibn Sab'in. For example, Nasafi writes.

The shaykh of shaykhs Sa'd al-Din Hammuya was asked, “What is God?”

He replied, “The existent [al-mawjud] is God.”

Then he was asked, “What is the cosmos?”

He replied, “There is no existent but God.”

Nasafi probably played a much more important role than Hammuya in popularizing Ibn al-'Arabi teachings, through such well-known Persian works as *Insan-i kamil*. Like Ibn Sab'in, to whom he sometimes refers in his works, Nasafi employs the expression *wahdat al-wujud* in a few instances as a technical term to refer to a whole doctrine, not part of a doctrine. And like Ibn Taymiyya after him, he frequently employs the expression *ahl-i wahdat*, the “people of oneness,” to refer to those who supported *wahdat al-wujud*. He was probably the first to divide the people of oneness into different groups according to their differing formulations of *wahdat al-wujud*.

In several instances Nasafi includes his own master Hammuya among the people of oneness, and in one passage he says that some of them consider God's creation as “imagination and display” (*0 khayal wa namayish*). He probably has Hammuya in mind as a member of this group, since we read in Hammuya's *al-Misbah fi*

l-lasawwuf, a book of obscure meditations on the symbolism of letters, “Whatever you see other than oneness is imagination.”

Ibn Taymiyya

The violent attacks mounted by the Hanbalite jurist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) against Ibn al-'Arabi and those who followed him are well known. Ibn Taymiyya often refers to the term *wahdat al-wujud*, even employing it in the titles of two of his treatises: *Ibtal wahdat al-wujud* (“Showing the falsity of *wahdat al-wujud*”) and *Risala ila man saalahu an haqiqal madhhah al-ittihadiyyim, ay al-qailm bi-wahdat al-wujud* (“A treatise written to the one who asked him about the reality of the position of the unificationists, that is, those who support *wahdat al-wujud*”). It is particularly significant that in the second of these titles Ibn Taymiyya identifies “oneness of *wujud*” with “unificationism” (*ittihad*). He repeats this identification in many passages of his works, often adding the term “incarnationism” (*hulul*) as a second near-synonym. Both terms had long been attacked as the heresies of certain sects or figures, and both are specifically rejected by Ibn al-'Arabi and his followers, at least in the meaning that is given to the terms by those who criticize them.

Ibn Taymiyya sums up his objections to the proponents of *wahdat al-wujud* by claiming that they deny the three basic principles of the religion: They have no faith in God, in His prophets, or in the Last Day. I quote part of his explanation:

As for faith in God: They think that His *wujud* is identical with the *wujud* of the cosmos and that the cosmos has no other maker than the cosmos itself.

As for the prophets: These people think that they have more knowledge of God than God’s Messenger and all the other prophets. Some claim to take knowledge of God - that is, *wahdat al-wujud* and atheism [*ta'til*] - from the Prophets’ lamp.

Note that in this passage, by citing *wahdat al-wujud* and *ta'til* as parallel terms, Ibn Taymiyya is identifying the two. *Ta'til* is variously defined in theological texts and always condemned. Its basic meaning is to consider God divested of His office, somewhat in the fashion of deism.

Ibn Taymiyya claims that the supporters of wahdat al-wujud believe that the wujud of the cosmos is identical with the wujud of God: “Those who uphold wahdat al-wujud say that wujud is one and that the necessary wujud that belongs to the Creator is the same as the possible wujud that belongs to the creature.” Elsewhere he writes, “The reality of the words” of those who speak of wahdat al-wujud “is that the wujud of the engendered things is identical with the wujud of God; it is nothing else and nothing different.”

In other words, Ibn Taymiyya holds that according to Ibn al- Arabi, God and the cosmos are identical. Thus he takes a simplistic view of one side of Ibn al-'Arabi teaching - that of similarity of immanence (tashbih) - and completely ignores the other side, that of incomparability or transcendence (tanzih). Ibn al-'Arabi often restated position is “He/not He.” The wujud of the cosmos can be said to be identical with the wujud of God in one respect, but strictly speaking, the cosmos has no wujud. The whole problem is to define the subtle relationship that exists between the real wujud of God and the unreal wujud of the creatures. Ibn Taymiyya and most of those who followed in his footsteps seem to have believed that there must be a simple, straightforward explanation for the relationship between God and the cosmos. In contrast, Ibn al-'Arabi and most of his followers held that the highest understanding is utter bewilderment (hayra) in the face of a reality that defies the categories of yes and no, either/or.

In any case, it is not my purpose to defend Ibn al-'Arabi against the charges of Ibn Taymiyya and others. I merely want to point out that Ibn Taymiyya considered wahdat al-wujud synonymous with atheism and unbelief, since he saw it as a denial of the distinction between God and the cosmos. And because of his frequent explicit attacks on the term wahdat al-wujud, he probably deserves more credit than anyone else for making it a center of contention in Islamic history, since, as we have seen, it played no important role in the technical vocabulary of Ibn al-'Arabi and his direct followers. Even third and fourth generation commentators on the Fusus al-hikam, like Jandi's student 'Abd al-Razzaq Kashani (d. 730/1330) and Kashani's student Sharaf al-din Dawud Qaysari (d. 751/1350) - both contemporaries of Ibn Taymiyya - rarely if ever mention the term. In a treatise called Asas al-wahddniyya (“The Foundation of Oneness”), in which he discusses the terms wahda and wujud in

detail, Qaysari can get no closer to the expression *wahdat al-wujud* than one instance of *wahda wajib al-wujud*, the “Oneness of the Necessary Being.” Hence, when Ibn Taymiyya singled out the term *wahdat al-wujud* as exemplifying the position of the unificationists, he probably derived it from the works of Ibn Sab'in, to which he often refers, or from one of Ibn Sab'in's disciples.

Though Ibn Taymiyya and others like him employed the term *wahdat al-wujud* to denote the heresies they perceived in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabi school, Ibn al-'Arabi later followers seemed to have had no qualms about accepting the term as a convenient denotation for their overall worldview. They were happy to consider it a term of praise, even if their critics considered it a term of blame. Thus by the middle of the ninth/fifteenth century 'Abd al-Rahman Jam! (d. 898/1492), one of the greatest propagators of Ibn al-'Arabi serious metaphysical and cosmological teachings, commonly speaks of the “supporters of the oneness of being” (*al-qailun bi wahdat al-wujud*), meaning thereby Ibn al-'Arabi, Qunawi, Farghanl, and the main line of *Fusus* commentators.

The history of the term *wahdat al-wujud* can be summarized as follows: The term is not found in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabi. For Qunawi, it has no specific technical sense; where it does occur, it means simply that there is only one true *wujud*, the *wujud* of God. The relationship of this *wujud* to the things of the world needs to be explained; it is not implied in the term *wahdat al-wujud* itself. In FaghanT's writings *wahdat al-wujud* is well on its way to becoming a technical term, but it does not stand on its own, since it needs to be complemented by *kathrat al-'ilm*, the many ness of knowledge. Off to the side of this main line of Ibn al-'Arabi followers, other figures like Ibn Sab'In and NasafT were employing the term as a kind of shorthand to allude to the fundamental nature of things. Ibn Taymiyya seized upon the expression as a synonym for the great heresies of unificationism and incarnationism. By the time of Jam!, and perhaps much before, *wahdat al-wujud* became the designation for an expression of *tawhid* that was typified by the writings of Ibn al-'Arabi and his followers.

Orientalists

Western studies of Ibn al-'Arabi in modern times have greatly complicated the task of discerning what is meant by *wahdat*

al-wujud. Many of the earlier orientalists, like historians of thought in general, felt that by putting a label on an idea, they had understood it and had no more need to think about it. Ibn al-'Arabi in particular attracted labels, which is not surprising. One look at the difficulty and sheer volume of his writings convinced most people that it would be futile to spend a lifetime trying to decipher them.

The easiest solution was to call Ibn al-'Arabi a pantheist or to claim that he stood outside of “orthodox” Islam and to move on to greener pastures. This was far preferable to admitting that he was a spiritual teacher, sage, philosopher, theologian, Koran commentator, and jurist of the first order, a figure whose elaborate synthesis of Islamic thought cannot be approached without long years of training. After all, what would be gained by admitting that the Orient had produced forms of knowledge that cannot be filed into neat cubbyholes?

More recently, a number of serious scholars have taken the trouble to study some of Ibn al- Arabi works and to meditate upon his teachings in depth. The facile assumptions of an earlier generation have been largely discarded, but the old labels are still to be found in the secondary literature. Among specialists, it is now generally recognized that “the repeated use of alien and inappropriate interpretive categories - e.g., ‘pantheist,’ ‘monist,’ ‘theology,’ ‘heterodox/orthodox,’ etc. - ... cannot but mislead those lacking a firsthand acquaintance with Ibn al-'Arabi’s works.”

To try to sort out the views of Ibn al-'Arabi offered by various orientalists over the past one hundred years would entail a major study. Here I can only suggest that Western scholars have reflected the split concerning Ibn al-'Arabi found in Islam itself. Hence they have been divided into two camps: those for and those against, even though the language of “objective” scholarship often conceals personal predilections. In the eyes of those who take a negative approach, wahdat al-wujud becomes an easily dismissed “ism,” or perhaps a distortion of “authentic” and “orthodox” Islam brought about by a morbid preoccupation with imaginative speculation that was but a prelude to the decline of a civilization. Scholars who offer a positive evaluation have realized that the worldview of this figure who has dominated much of Islamic thought for the past six hundred years cannot be dismissed so easily. Some even maintain that wahdat al-wujud represents a providential reformulation of

tawhid in a philosophical language that can provide practical solutions for the spiritual malaise of the modern world.

The meanings of the term wahdat al-wujud

This brief review of the history of the term wahdat al-wujud allows me to propose seven different ways in which the term has been understood, without intending to be exhaustive. First, wahdat al-wujud denotes a school of thought that goes back to Ibn al-'Arabi and makes certain statements about the nature of the relationship between God and the world. This meaning of the term came to be accepted by supporters and opponents of Ibn al-'Arabi and was established by the time of Jami.

The remaining six definitions depend on whether the person who employs the term has evaluated this school of thought positively or negatively.

A. Supporters

(1) When Qunawi and Farghani employ the term wahdat al-wujud, it represents a statement about wujud or reality itself, without any implication that a whole system of thought lies behind it; in their works the term is invariably complemented by an affirmation of the manyness and plurality of the Real's self-manifestation in the cosmos.

(2) For Ibn Sab'in, Nasafi, and the whole later tradition of Ibn al-'Arabi's followers, the expression wahdat al-wujud itself represents a sufficient statement about the nature of things. Those who employed the term in this sense felt no need to point out, at least not in the immediate context, that multiplicity also possesses a certain reality, though most of them do not deny this fact, except perhaps in moments of rhetorical excess.

(3) In the later tradition of Sufism and Islamic philosophy, wahdat al-wujud is often employed as a virtual synonym for tawhid, with the understanding that it refers primarily to the Sufi approach to expressing tawhid. In this most general sense the term can be used to refer to the ideas of Sufis who flourished long before Ibn al-'Arabi.

B. Opponents

(1) For Ibn Taymiyya, *wahdat al-wujud* is practically synonymous with incarnationism and unificationism, that is, the thesis that God and the world, or God and man, are identical. By a slight extension of this meaning, *wahdat al-wujud* becomes identical with broader negative categories, such as heresy, atheism, and unbelief (*ilhad* , *zandaqa*, *ta'til*, *shirk*, *kufr*). I would also place in this category those Western interpretations of *wahdat al-wujud* that place upon it labels such as pantheism, usually with the obvious intent of denigrating its supporters and convincing us that we need not take it seriously.

(2) Certain later Sufis in India, especially Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624), employ the term *wahdat al-wujud* in a less negative sense.

In general they acknowledge that it possesses a certain validity, but they maintain that "*wahdat al-shuhud*" represents a higher degree of spiritual attainment. Though much research needs to be carried out before the sources and aims of this debate become completely clear, it seems that *wahdat al-shuhud* was proposed as a preferable position to *wahdat al-wujud* at least partly to foil the criticisms of Ibn Taymiyya and his followers. As Mole has pointed out, Sirhindī's way of expressing himself concerning *wahdat al-shuhud* "safeguarded the transcendence and absolute otherness of God." If many Sufis continued to support *wahdat al-wujud* in opposition to *wahdat al-shuhud*, it was no doubt because in their eyes, *wahdat al-wujud* never posed any threat to God's transcendence and absolute otherness in the first place.

(3) The Indian distinction between *wahdat al-wujud* and *wahdat al-shuhud* was taken up by several orientalists, including Massignon, Anawati, and Gardet, who then read this distinction back into Islamic history on highly questionable grounds. Massignon had a well-known personal preference for the love mysticism of al-Hallaj and a deep aversion to Ibn al-'Arabi approach. For him and those who followed him, *wahdat al-wujud* became "static existential monism," while *wahdat al-shuhud* was "dynamic testimonial monism," the latter far to be preferred over the former, not least because it accorded with "orthodoxy." Massignon's attribution of a "static" mysticism to those who supported *wahdat al-wujud* illustrates the typical sort of oversimplification indulged in by those who place labels on Ibn al-Arabi, thus mutilating a highly complex doctrinal synthesis. It is not my purpose to suggest all of the

misunderstandings caused by reading such simplistically interpreted dichotomies back into Islamic history. I will only add that later Sufism came to distinguish between *wahdat al-wujud* and *wahdat al-shuhud* for internal reasons, to some of which I have already alluded. But to make this distinction normative for the whole history of Sufism is nearly as misleading as to employ categories such as pantheism. Though one cannot deny that Sufis illustrate deep differences of perspective, one can be certain that scholars who attempt to redefine terms such as *wahdat al-wujud* and *wahdat al-shuhud* in terms of Western philosophical and psychological categories only add to the confusion already present in our perception of Sufism's history.

These few remarks on the problems of understanding what is meant by the term *wahdat al-wujud* should at least warn us that we need to look carefully at how people who employ the term evaluate

Ibn al-'Arabi teachings. In general, sympathizers see *wahdat al-wujud* as a restatement of *tawhīd* in the language of the advanced and refined intellectuality of later Islamic history, while detractors consider it a deviation from the supposedly clear distinctions drawn between God and the cosmos by the early and relatively unsophisticated schools of theology. Nevertheless, the term *wahdat al-wujud* carries a good deal of baggage because of the long debate over its use. Thus all sorts of complications can arise that obscure what is at issue.

An interesting example of these complications is provided by the *Festschrift* prepared for the 800th anniversary of Ibn al-'Arabi birth, in which an Egyptian scholar, who is a fervent supporter of Ibn al-'Arabi, writes that those who attribute *wahdat al-wujud* to Ibn al-'Arabi commit a grievous error. Though this scholar never defines what he understands by *wahdat al-wujud*, it is clear that he has accepted the negative evaluation of the term offered by Ibn al-'Arabi's opponents. In answer to this article, an Iranian scholar has written a strong rebuttal in which he demonstrates, in the light of the Iranian intellectual tradition, that *wahdat al-wujud* forms the backbone of Islamic thought. It does not even occur to this critic to ask whether the Egyptian scholar has understood the term in the same way that he does. Careful reading of the two authors shows that they do not disagree as to what Ibn al-'Arabi believed and wrote about; both accept him as one of the greatest intellectual and

spiritual authorities of Islam. They have merely stumbled over divergent understandings of the term wahdat al-wujud.

Rumi

Finally I turn to Rumi. In what respect can the term wahdat al-wujud be applied to his teachings? In other words, do any of the seven meanings offered above apply to Rumi's way of looking at things?

Needless to say, Rumi never employs the term wahdat al-wujud, so we can eliminate the two specific meanings that give to the term itself a technical significance (A(1) and A(2) above). We can also eliminate the three negative definitions, since Rumi is too grand a figure to need defense against accusations of pantheism or unbelief, and he flourished long before anyone had tried to distinguish between wahdat al-wujud and wahdat al-shuhud.

This leave us with two definitions. When one says that wahdat al-wujud is simply tawhid expressed in the language of the Sufis and accepts that the words of Ma'ruf al-Karkhi in the second/eighth century. There is nothing in wujud but God," are a statement of wahdat al-wujud, then of course Rumi was a spokesman for wahdat al-wujud, and innumerable passages from his works can be cited to support this contention.

This leaves the definition of wahdat al-wujud in the first sense, as denoting the perspective of the specific school of thought that goes back to Ibn al-'Arabi. Many people have said that Rumi believed in wahdat al-wujud because he was a follower or disciple of Ibn al-'Arabi. R. A. Nicholson, the greatest Western authority on the Masnan, added weight to this approach by maintaining that Rumi was influenced by him. Most recently, the Encyclopedia of Religion calls Rumi a member of "Ibn al-'Arabi's school," though not in the article on Rumi himself, written by Annemarie Schimmel.

My own position is that Ibn al-'Arabi exercised no perceptible influence on Rumi. The reasons for this are many. First, however, out of respect for these two great masters, I want to engage in a bit of introspection and ask why we are interested in such problems in the first place.

Scholars of an earlier generation seem to have felt that by saying

“x influenced y” they had explained something of profound importance. Today, many people have come to understand that this sort of approach is deftly designed to turn their attention away from all that was considered important within the historical and cultural context in question. For Rumi and ibn al-'Arabi, historical influence was simply irrelevant to what they were saying. Like other Muslim sages, they considered the divine as primary and the human and historical as secondary. The spirit or meaning (ma'na) is the root and the source, while the body or form (sura) is the branch and the shadow. Whether metaphysically, cosmologically, or intellectually, the meaning of a doctrine takes precedence, while the forms it assumes are of secondary interest. Both Rumi and Ibn al-'Arabi repeatedly affirm that they have not taken the content of their teachings from any human being. Their “vision” is of primary importance, not the source from which they derived the various formal elements that go to express it. For them, the vision was all. Divine self-disclosures are central, not peripheral. The transformative power of a Rumi or an Ibn al-'Arabi derives from an intimate experience of God, and this power is not to be taken lightly, since it instilled a vibrant love and life into much of Islamic culture from the thirteenth century down to recent times, and it still possesses enough strength to attract “modern” men and women to esoteric conferences. One cannot read these authors without standing in awe of their incredibly deep and profound mastery not only of the “roots of the roots of the roots of religion,” as Rumi put it, but the roots of everything that allows for a full flowering of the human condition.

Rumi speaks also for Ibn al-'Arabi when he addresses his readers with the words, “Having seen the form, you are unaware of the meaning. If you are wise, pick out the pearl from the shell!” But our business as scholars is to trade in shells, not pearls. By definition, we miss the point. Once we understand that our research, from the perspective of the teachings of those we are studying, is off the mark, we can turn to the shells with perhaps a small amount of humility, knowing that the pearls will never be found through our trade.

This does not mean that the shells should be denigrated. No matter how great was the spiritual vision of a Rumi or an Ibn al-'Arabi, it was expressed in shells, and on this level it is possible to speak about elements deriving from earlier sources and to draw certain conclusions about Rumi’s predecessors. Those who claim

that Rumi spoke for wahdat al-wujud in the specific sense of the doctrine propounded by Ibn al-'Arabi or his immediate followers will have to prove their contentions through these formal elements.

Henry Corbin remarks that “it would be quite superficial to dwell on the contrast between the two forms of spirituality cultivated by Mawlana and Ibn al-'Arabi.” One agrees with Corbin that at the level of meaning, Rumi and Ibn al-'Arabi converge profoundly, since they both spoke on behalf of the Supreme Meaning. But one also agrees that Ibn al-'Arabi and Rumi represent “two forms of spirituality” which, as forms, are different. If one wants to talk about influence, this can be perceived only on the superficial level where forms influence forms, the same level where similarities and differences are perceived. No one can reach inside the hearts of Rumi and Ibn al-'Arabi except through the forms and imagery that they use to express their inward states. At the inward level, there may indeed be deep and profound connections between Rumi and Ibn al-'Arabi, since both lived and breathed wahdat al-wujud in the general sense of tawhfd. But to speak of influence on the level of “meaning” or “spirit” is simply to indulge in speculation, since knowledge of influence can only be gained by means of the formal level. Once formal influence is found, there may be justification for concluding that there was a deeper, spiritual influence. Hence, one first has to look for borrowings of technical terms and poetical images.

In fact, at the level of linguistic forms, there is no concrete evidence that Ibn al-Arabi doctrines, whether wahdat al-wujud or any other doctrine, influenced Rumi's mode of expression. Rumi employs few if any technical terms, poetical images, and concepts also employed by Ibn al- Arabi that are not found in earlier authors. Both Rumi and Ibn al-'Arabi were thoroughly familiar with all branches of religious knowledge, including Sufi classics such as al-Qushayri's Risala and al-Ghazali Ihya 'ulum al-din, so it is only natural that they share certain common terms and themes. But Ibn al-Arabi also employed many terms in a specific manner that was not to be found in earlier writers; it is these specific terms and ideas that cannot be found in Rumi works, though they can be found in the poetry of his contemporary Fakhr al-Din 'Iraqi (d. 688/1289), a disciple of Qunawi, and in the verses of many poets of the next century, such as Shabistari (d. 720/1320) and Maghribi (d. 809/1406-1407).

One might object that Rumi was a greater poet than Ibn al-'Arabi and therefore had no need to employ the terminology of Ibn al-'Arabi, but that he was influenced nevertheless. This comes down to pure conjecture, since, once again, it only makes sense to speak of influence on the level of the formal elements involved. Moreover, there are many obvious influences upon Rumi's poetry by such figures as the Sufi poets Sana'i (d. 525/1131) and 'Attar (d. 620/1218), or Rumi's father Baha Walad, and Shams-i Tabrizi. One cannot claim that Rumi was too great to show influence from Ibn al-'Arabi, but not great enough to discard the influence of Sana'i and Attar. Nor can one object that it was a question of the difference between Arabic and Persian, since much of Rumi's technical terminology is derived from Arabic and he himself was the author of several hundred Arabic verses. And rather than seeing in his Arabic poetry the influence of Ibn al-'Arabi, one sees the imagery of an Attar or a Sana'i carried over from Persian.

In a broad historical context, it is not difficult to discern two relatively independent currents within Sufism, without denying cross-fertilization. Ibn al-'Arabi brings to fruition several centuries of spiritual ferment in Andalusia, North Africa, and Egypt. Rumi brings to a climax a tradition of Persian Sufism going back to such figures as Ansari, Sana'i, and Ahmad Ghazali (d. 520/1126), author of the *Sawanih*, surely the most seminal work on love in the Persian language. The influence of Ansari was especially widespread because of *Kashf al-asrar* (written in 520/1126), a lengthy Persian Koran commentary by his disciple Rashid al-din Maybudi and a rich source of Sufi teachings. Rumi may have been familiar with *Rawh al-arwah*, a long Persian commentary on the divine names by Ahmad Sam'anI (d. 534/1140) from Marw. This work, only recently brought to the attention of the scholarly community, constantly reminds one of Rumi's concerns and style. Its audacious approach to Islamic teachings, constant stress on the importance of love, and highly poetical use of language may well have been one of Rumi's formal inspirations. Moreover, no one was as close to Rumi as his father Baha' Walad and Shams al-din Tabrizi, both of whose writings influenced his poetry profoundly. Rumi's father, who initiated Rumi into Sufism, was a member of a Sufi order that went back to Ahmad Ghazali by way of 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani (d. 525/1131), the author of important works on love and a major precursor of the type of theosophical Sufism that characterizes Ibn

al-'Arabi school. The works of these authors provide more than enough material to account for any formal resemblances that might exist between Rumi and earlier Sufism.

No one denies that earlier figures influenced Rumi by providing him with imagery, symbols, technical terms, and doctrines. With this raw material Rumi constructed a bodily form into which he breathed the spirit of his own vision of tawhid. But if the claim is to be made that a specific figure exercised influence, there must be concrete reasons for making the claim. Since the influence from certain directions is indeed obvious, there is no need to posit other sources without solid evidence. If certain images or technical terms are found in the writings of Rumi father or 'Attar, no one has to look any further, even if the image or term in question was also employed by Ibn al-'Arabi. Appendix I illustrates that in the specific instances where Nicholson claimed that Rumi drew inspiration from Ibn al-'Arabi, there were more likely sources in Rumi immediate environment.

It is not only the lack of any specific evidence that convinces one that Rumi was free of Ibn al-'Arabi influence, it is also the deep difference between their perspectives, even if this lies only at what Corbin calls the “superficial” level of form. For example, Rumi places love at the center of all things, much in the tradition of Ahmad Ghazali and Sam'ani. He expresses the ultimate value of love through verses that constantly manifest the spiritual state of intoxication (sukr), though many lines of the Masnavi in particular demonstrate an eminent sobriety (sahw). Ibn al-'Arabi and his followers also place an extremely high value on love. Their discussions of the nature of the supreme spiritual realizations achieved by the knowers of God are almost inconceivable without their commentaries on the famous hadith qudsi, “My servant keeps drawing near to Me through supererogatory works until I love him; then when I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks.” Nevertheless, love does not permeate every line of their writings, as it does with Rumi. One can imagine Ibn al-'Arabi without love - in spite of Corbin - but one cannot imagine Rumi without love.

Another point: Rumi and Ibn al-'Arabi directed their works at two completely different audiences. Ibn al-'Arabi and his followers

wrote for the ‘ulama, those with thorough training not only in the Koran, hadith, and jurisprudence, but also in kalam and philosophy. None but the highly learned need apply to study their works. In contrast, Rumi composed poetry in order to stir up the fire of love in the hearts of his listeners, whoever they might be, whether learned scholars, practitioners of Sufism, or simply the common people. He aimed his poetry at anyone with an understanding of the Persian language and a modicum of spiritual taste (dhawq) or a sense of love and beauty. No one meeting these minimal requirements could help but be swept away by the intoxicating power of his lyrics. Rumi spoke the language of the masses, and much of his “technical” terminology was derived from everyday discourse. No one needed any special educational or intellectual qualifications to appreciate his message. As a result, Rumi’s language and teachings are far more universal than Ibn al-‘Arabi, in the sense that only a small number of scholars with Sufi training could hope to understand the latter.

To sum up the difference of approach between Rumi and Ibn al-‘Arabi, I can do no better than relate an anecdote told to me by one of the foremost traditional philosophers of Iran, Sayyid Jalal ai-Din Ashtiyani, himself a devotee of both Ibn al-‘Arabi and Rumi. One day Sadr al-Din Qunawi went to see Rumi and sat with him at the head of his audience chamber. One of Rumi’s disciples came forward and asked a question which, to Shaykh Sadr al-Din, seemed a very difficult one, but Rumi was able to answer it instantaneously, employing his usual colloquial style. Qunawi turned to Rumi and asked, “How are you able to express such difficult and abstruse metaphysics in such simple language?” Rumi replied, “How are you able to make such simple ideas sound so complicated?”

Like Rumi, Ibn al-‘Arabi spent much of his time in the divine presence, but his mode of experiencing the divine took a relatively sober and intellectual form, while Rumi expressed his relationship with his beloved in the intoxicating imagery of love and rapture. In short, these two towering spiritual masters personify deeply divergent modes of spirituality that were providentially aimed at different human types, for, as the Sufi saying has it, “There are as many ways to God as there are human souls.” If someone insists on naming the vision that inspired them wahdat al-wujud, I cannot protest, so long as he or she remembers that Rumi experienced that vision directly, without historical intermediaries.

Appendix 1

Ibn al-'Arabi “influence” on the Masnavi

In translating and explaining the Masnavi, Nicholson seems to have paid a good deal of attention to Turkish commentaries (such as those of Ismail Anqirawi and Sari Abdallah) that explain the text in terms of the worldview of Ibn al-'Arabi's school, a worldview that has dominated the intellectual expression of Sufism until recent times. Nicholson frequently quotes parallels with Rumi's verses in Ibn al-'Arabi's writings or explains Rumi's concepts in terms of Ibn al-'Arabi's teachings, and he claims that Rumi derived some of his teachings from Ibn al-'Arabi.

Though Nicholson was familiar with Ibn al-'Arabi, he paid little or no attention to the great Sufis who wrote in the Persian language before Rumi, such as Sana'i, Attar, Maybudi, and Sam'ani. Nor did he have at his disposal two of the most important sources for Rumi's technical terms and imagery, the Ma'arif of Baha' Walad and the Maqaldt of Shams-i Tabriz! The editors of these two works have indicated a few of the numerous instances where Rumi was directly inspired by them, while pointing out that the influence is so pervasive that it would be impossible to describe it fully. The recent publication of Sam'ani's Rawh al-arwah, a great treasury of Sufi teachings on love, suggests that many of Rumi's teachings were already current among Persian Sufis a hundred years earlier, and it is the high quality of Rumi's poetry rather than what he has to say that has made him the center of attention. No doubt other Persian works that demonstrate the intellectual content of Persian Sufism prior to Rumi are still lying in libraries unread, or have simply disappeared.

On several occasions in his commentary on the Masnavi, Nicholson asserts or suggests that Rumi was influenced by Ibn al-'Arabi, without providing any evidence other than a certain formal resemblance. In what follows I list the most important of these instances and propose other far more likely sources for Rumi's formulations. The numbers refer to the book and verse of the Masnavi.

I, 606-10. “Thou didst show the delightfulness of Being unto not being, [after] thou hadst caused not-being to fall in love with thee

Commentary: “The leading ideas in this passage come from Ibnu 'l-'Arabi, though their provenance is disguised (as usual) by the poetical form in which they are presented ... Ibnu 'l-'Arabi, and Rumi after him, frequently make use of ... [the term ‘not-being’ (adam , nisti, nist)] to denote things which, though non-existent in one sense, are existent in another.”

Note Nicholson’s attempt to show that Rumi is full of borrowings from Ibn al-'Arabi by employing the expression “ as usual.” One wants to know first of all why Rumi should have felt it necessary to disguise the provenance of his ideas. Did he fear someone? He certainly could have employed Ibn al-'Arabi specific technical terms if he had wanted, just as his contemporary 'Iraqi did. The editors of Baha Walad’s Ma'arif and Shams-i Tabrizis Maqalat list many instances where Rumi employs expressions from the works of his predecessors without attempting to hide their provenance. Some of Shams’s utterances are far more scandalous than anything Ibn al-'Arabi ever said, but Rumi does not conceal them; on the contrary, he sometimes tries to top them.

Rumi constantly meditates upon the relationship between existence and non-existence. How could it be otherwise, given the profundity of his thought? The basic idea of this whole passage can easily be taken back to the repeated Koranic assertion that when God wants to bring a thing into existence. He says to it “Be!” and then it is. Where is the thing before God says to it “Be” if not “non-existent in one sense ... existent in another”? It is true that Ibn al-'Arabi often employs the terms “being” and “not-being,” but so do numerous other figures with whom Rumi was familiar, such as Baha' Walad, Shams, 'Attar, and Abu Hamid Ghazali, as well as others whom he probably knew, like Ahmad Ghazali and 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani. Or take these typical passages from Sam'ani: “Your existence is like non-existence, and your non-existence like existence” (Rawh al-arwah , p. 32). “Consider all existent things nonexistent in themselves and count all nonexistent things existent through His power” (ibid., p. 304).

I, 1112. “Reason is hidden, and [only] a world [of phenomena] is visible: our forms are the waves or a spray of it [of that hidden ocean].”

Commentary: “Underlying all individualized forms of being is the Unconditioned Divine Essence. This verse states concisely the doctrine of pantheistic monism (wahdatu 'l-wujud) in the form in which Rumi may have heard it enunciated by Sadru'ddin of Qoniyah, a pupil of Ibnu 'l-'Arabi.”

The verse expresses the relationship between the inward (batin) and outward (zahir), or the meaning (ma'na) and the form (sura), a doctrine that is fundamental to all Rumi's teachings. It is prefigured in the Koran and was perceived therein by spiritual teachers, Sufis, and philosophers from the earliest times. Neither Ibn al-'Arabi nor Sadr al-din Qunawi - nor Rumi, for that matter - ever identify Reason or Intellect (aql) with the Divine Essence. Rumi often refers to Intellect in the sense employed in this verse as 'aql-i kull, the “Universal Intellect,” whereas Ibn al-'Arabi is far more likely to employ the term al- aql al-awwal, the “First Intellect.” Ibn al-'Arabi sometimes considers the First Intellect as the source of the forms in this world, but the idea is not central to his teachings, since he most often identifies the forms of the universe with the self-disclosures or loci or manifestation of wujud.

A century before Ibn al-'Arabi, Sana'i devoted sections of Hadiqat al-haqa iq and Sayr al- ibad to 'aql (often employing the synonymous Persian term kfiirad), mentioning Intellect's cosmological function and employing the term aql-i kull in the process. For example.

Every good and evil under the heavens picks fruit from the stock of Intellect...

The bench of the Universal Intellect stands beneath the AH .

The imagery of the ocean and the spray is common. Baha' Walad writes, “The waves rose up from the Ocean of Non-existence, throwing the foam, the debris, and the shells - the forms - and the pearls - the meanings - upon the shore.”

1, 1133. “Therefore thou knewest light by its opposite: opposite reveals opposite in [the process of] coming forth.”

Commentary: “Characteristically the poet throughout this passage combines ideas derived from Plotinus with Ibnu 'l-'Arabi

view that God and the world are related to each other as the inward aspect (batin) and the outward aspect (zahir) of Being.”

As I have noted elsewhere, the word Nicholson renders as “[in the process of] coming forth” (sudur) should probably be understood not as a masdar but as the plural of sadr, “breast,” which accords more with the colloquial language and Rumi’s point. Nicholson read sudur, a technical term in philosophy, so that he could point to an “influence” and bring in Neo-Platonism. Even if we accept Nicholson’s unlikely reading, it shows only that Rumi was familiar with philosophical language, which no one doubts in any case.

The word “characteristically” in Nicholson’s commentary plays the same role as the expression “as usual” in the first passage quoted above. In spite of the claim that this borrowing is “characteristic” and “usual,” Nicholson provides no concrete evidence whatsoever that Ibn al-'Arabi is the direct or indirect source of any of Rumi’s ideas. The relationship between the terms batin and zahir and their centrality to Sufi thought was mentioned above.

I, 1736. “All kings are enslaved to their slaves, all people are dead [ready to die] for one who dies for them.”

Commentary: “These verses give a poetical form to the doctrine, with which students of Ibnu 'l-'Arabi are familiar, that correlative terms... are merely names for different aspects of the same reality.”

Here at least Nicholson does not claim explicitly that Rumi has derived these ideas from Ibn al-'Arabi. The importance of correlation and opposites for Islamic thought in general is obvious to anyone who has read the Koran with care, and it reappears in all sorts of connections throughout Islamic intellectual history. Nicholson sees in these verses a kind of ontological statement, as is usually the case with similar statements in Ibn al-'Arabi. However, as Nicholson implies in the remainder of his commentary on this verse, Rumi makes such statements in the light of his own experiences of love - and no one could claim that he did not know love in all its intricacies. Compare the underlying idea of this passage with Rumi’s statement, “One cannot conceive of the sound of one hand clapping ...He loves them is never separate from they love Him, nor is God is well-pleased with them ever without they are well-pleased

with Him [Koran 5:119].”

These few passages are the significant instances where Nicholson states or implies an influence from Ibn al-'Arabi. They are scant evidence indeed for the oft-repeated statement that Rumi was Ibn al-'Arabi's student or follower.

Appendix II

Ibn al-'Arabi influence on Attar (!)

In order to demonstrate the weakness of Nicholson's arguments to prove that Ibn al-'Arabi influenced Rumi, I would like to show how easy it is to draw the type of parallels that Nicholson provides as evidence. I hope thereby to “prove” that 'Attar was influenced by Ibn al-'Arabi, even though no one has ever suggested this, especially since 'Attar had died long before Ibn al-'Arabi wrote his influential works, the Futuhat and the Fusiis al-hikam.

I quote a few verses from one of 'Attar's qasidas; similar verses are plentiful in his writings. In order to think that 'Attar was deeply influenced by Ibn al-'Arabi, we only have to accept, as Nicholson does concerning Rumi, that in each passage “The leading ideas ... come from Ibnu 'l-'Arabi though their provenance is disguised (as usual) by the poetical form in which they are presented.”

Oh You who have veiled Your face
and come into the bazaar,

A whole creation has been seized
by this talisman!

Though no manifest and incomparable in Himself, God has become manifest and similar through creation. However, He is manifest as “other,” so we do not perceive Him and remain ignorant of His presence. “People are veiled from the Real through the Real, because the Real is so clearly visible” (Futuhat , II, p. 85.17). “This present world is the locus of the Veil, except in the case of the gnostics” (ibid., II, p. 654.4). “Nothing exists but veils let down; the objects of perception are the veils” (ibid.. III, p. 214.25).

Everything other than You
is a mirage and a display,
for neither little

nor much has come [into the “other”].

Everything other than the divine essence is what Ibn al-'Arabi calls “imagination” (note that Nasafi, in the passage quoted above, considers “imagination” (khayat) synonymous with “display” (namayish)). Nothing has “gone out” of God to enter into wujud, since wujud is God Himself and does not change. The appearances we perceive in wujud are simply the properties of the entities, which remain forever nonexistent. “Everything other than the Essence of the Real is intervening imagination and vanishing shadow” (ibid., II, p. 313.17).

Here unificationism is unbelief,
and so also incarnationism,
for this is oneness,

but it has come in repetition [takrar]

Attar first points out, as Ibn al-'Arabi followers often do, that wahdat al-wujud is totally different from the heresies ittihad and hulul. The verse as a whole provides a concise statement of Ibn al-'Arabi doctrine of continuous creation, the fact that “self-disclosure never repeats itself.” “There is no repetition whatsoever in wujud, because of the divine vastness” (ibid., 11, p. 302.18). The idea that the “One” produces manyness through repeating itself is a common theme in Ibn al-'Arabi writings. The cosmos is nothing but a collection of “ones,” since one times one equals one. “There is nothing in wujud except God. Though the Entity is many in witnessing (shuhud), it is one in wujud. To multiply one by one is to multiply a thing by itself, so it yields nothing but its own kind” (ibid., IV, p. 357.2).

There is one Maker, while His handiworks
are thousands of thousands!

Everything has come into manifestation
from the ready cash of knowledge.

The objects of the divine knowledge - the immutable entities - are

like God's ready cash, since they are ever-present with Him. "God knows the cosmos in the state of its nonexistence, and He gives it existence according to its form in His Knowledge" (ibid., I, p. 90-26).

The Ocean produced the "other"
with its own waves -
a cloud identical with the drop
has come into the bazaar.

Things are "other than God" only in respect of their appearance of independence, not in respect of wujud. "In reality, there is no 'other,' except the entities of the possible things in respect of their immutability, not in respect of their wujud' (ibid., II, p. 10.13). "In reality the 'other' is immutable/not immutable, He/not He" (ibid., II, p. 501-4).

This has an exact analogy
in the sun: Its reflection
fills the two worlds
with light.

Like others, Ibn al-'Arabi associates wujud and light, since each can be defined as that which is manifest in itself and makes others manifest. "There is nothing stronger than light, since it possesses manifestation and through it manifestation takes place, while all things are in utter need of manifestation, and without light no manifestation takes place" (ibid., II, p. 466.20).

The harmonious Entity,
other than whom not an atom exists,
became manifest; only then
did all these "others" come to be.

A reflection showed itself

from beneath the veil of Oneness,
entering into a hundred thousand
veils of imagination.

These lines repeat what was said earlier, employing different imagery. In short, things in the universe are but the manifestation of real wujud in a multiplicity of forms.

He manifested to Himself
the mystery of self-breathing -
eighteen thousand worlds of mystery
came into being.

Ibn al-'Arabi also speaks of the “eighteen thousand” worlds created by God. The expression “self-breathing” (khwud-dami) alludes to what Ibn al-'Arabi calls the “Breath of the All-merciful” (nafas al-rahman), the Supreme Barzakh standing between God and the cosmos. The Breath is both identical to God (“manifest to Himself”) and the locus within which the cosmos becomes manifest (the “eighteen thousand worlds”). The “mystery” has to do with the fact that the worlds are neither God nor other than God; they are “He/not He.” “Through God’s words ‘Be!’ ... the entities become manifest within the Breath of the All-merciful, just as words become manifest within the human breath” (ibid., II, p. 401.29).

He shone one ray of His light,
and the world was filled with lamps;

He planted one seed,

and all these fruits grew up!

In the Garden of Love
the One Unity flashed forth:

Branches, trees, petals, thorns -
all began to bloom!

Both these lines provide images to illustrate the oneness of wujud in itself and the manyness of its manifestations.

Disclosing Yourself to Yourself
is Your work,

in order that a hundred thousand works
may spring forth from one work!

By the word “disclosing” (Jilwa) 'Attar alludes to the oft-quoted statement in Ibn al-'Arabi school, “He disclosed Himself to

Himself in Himself' (tajalla li-dhatihi ft dhatihi).

O You whose manifest side is lover
and whose no manifest side is Beloved!

Who has ever seen the sought
become the seeker?

Those who love God are themselves nothing but loci of manifestation of His properties, so in effect God loves Himself. "There is no lover and no beloved except God, since there is nothing in wujud except the Divine Presence, that is, His Essence, His attributes, and His acts" (ibid., II, p. 114.14). "He is the lover and the beloved, the seeker and the sought" (ibid., II, p. 331.18).

Who is that, and from whence
had He displayed Himself?

What is that, and what is this,
that have come into manifestation?

At the highest state of knowledge the gnostic is bewildered by both God and the cosmos. Is the cosmos God, or is it other than God? "You say, it is creation, but in itself it is neither the Real, nor other than the Real... The elect... sometimes say, 'We are we and He is He,' sometimes, 'He is we and we are He,' and sometimes, 'We are not purely we and He is not purely He.'... So knowledge of the Real is bewilderment, and knowledge of creation is bewilderment" (ibid., IV, p. 279.3).